

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH GENERAL ROBERT HOLMES, DEPUTY
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND (VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ)
SUBJECT: AOR REGIONAL THREATS TIME: 3:00 P.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2008

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs): With that, hello. I'd like to welcome all of you to the
Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, August 19th, 2008. My
name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating our call today. A note to the bloggers
on the call: Please remember to clearly state your name and organization you're
with in advance of your question.

With that, today our guest is Brigadier General Robert Holmes. He's the
deputy director of operations for U.S. Central Command, who will be discussing
the AOR regional threats and their networks.

Sir, before I turn it over to you, who's joining us? Q Jared
Fishman is on.

LT. CRAGG: I'm sorry?

Q Jared Fishman is on.

LT. CRAGG: Jared, okay. You're number six on the list. And who's
another question?

Q Troy Steward.

LT. CRAGG: Troy, you're number seven.

Okay, sir, I want to turn it over to you, and if you want to start with
an opening statement.

GEN. HOLMES: You bet. And thanks a lot. I'm glad we could make this
happen today. I know at one point yesterday we were looking at the weather here
in Tampa and what it was going to do to us in terms of dispersing our
communications capability. So the storm went a little east. So we could make
this happen today, and I'm glad.

I don't know if you know or not. At Central Command, we've got two
deputy directors of operations. My cohort, if you will, the other deputy
director, handles most of the kinetic and force management activities. And the
things that I look at are more of what we're looking at in terms of irregular

warfare, the non-kinetic solutions, some whole-of-government approaches, but particularly looking at the notion of information dominance in the battle space and things that we can do with our interagency partners to achieve effects without necessarily totally leaning on the kinetic effect. And I just use that as a preamble for some of the things we're going to talk about. It gives you a background or a little, I guess, insight to the way that I'm thinking about this.

Regional threat networks. I think, over the course of the last couple of chances we've had to talk, you may have heard me talk about these regional threat networks. They're threads of violent actors that range across the scope of terrorist actors to just international organized criminals to, I think, narco-terrorists or drug traders, and then, in some cases, just basic gangs, thieves and thugs that can come together and represent a very formidable threat to our region for a number of reasons.

So that's one thing that I'm really focused on is how is it that we counter and combat these regional threats and their networks. As we see it, they really fall in two camps as being, I think, the ones that we must deal with. And, of course, al Qaeda and its associated movements leads the way.

And then we look at -- and please understand the statement -- that we look at the malign Iranian influence. Now, that's not to say the government of Iran, but there is a malign Iranian influence that threads through this region that we've got to take a look at as well. And I think politically you can respect that and understand where I'm coming from.

So many of the things that I'm involved in is how we look at influencing, countering, and then ultimately disrupting and defeating these regional threat networks. And this is a very long-term strategy that we must be engaged in, and it runs the gamut from just counterterrorism to countercrime to however you want to look at it.

Another one of the things that you may want to talk about later today is how we see the current situation in Afghanistan, and particularly the Af-Pak border. And I'll be glad to just take questions on that as we get down to some of those things that you may want to ask about.

With that, let me give you more time than I take, and I figured probably about 96 seconds there is enough for me; so over to the first question.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And one person joined us at the very last minute. Who was that?

Q This is Tim Filbrad (sp), (New Media ?).

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Roger that.

Spencer, let's go to the first question.

Q Thanks a lot, General Holmes. It's Spencer Ackerman with the Washington Independent. And given what happened yesterday just outside Kabul and elsewhere, I would like to start with Afghanistan.

GEN. HOLMES: Okay.

Q Could you talk about what this latest attack heralds as what seems like a high water tide of impunity coming from the Taliban, testing the U.S., testing NATO? What does it augur? What's it going to require to defeat it? And are we supposed to believe that we are, in fact -- that we, in fact, have all the troops and all the capabilities that we need in Afghanistan?

GEN. HOLMES: Okay, that was about three parts. Let me address what I think I heard first was what does this mean to us with this high-profile attack against the -- and I'm sure you're talking the one against the French.

Q Yes, sir.

GEN. HOLMES: Yeah. I think this threat has been there all along. I think, you know, the French are new in this battle space. I don't know what went on prior to the French arrival, but I think these actors have been there for quite some time. If you look back into, I think, some of the operational reporting, you'll see that, you know, there have been weapons cache finds in this region. Maybe because of the change in ownership of the battle space, the adversary got a little bolder in trying to now deal with the French.

As we unthread it, I think we've got to look at exactly what part of the Taliban thread was it. Was it your basic vanilla Taliban or was it one of the other networks that is very much emboldened and much stronger? So I think, as our intel folks unthread that, you know, we'll have more answers.

I think the key is -- and this will go into the second part of your question or the second and third parts -- does it mean that we've misgauged the situation in Afghanistan? I don't think so. For the last two years, my take has been that the Taliban have never -- never went away. So this is not necessarily a resurgence, in my mind, as much as it is now the response to the fact that we recognize that, you know, we're presenting more force there.

We recognize the things that must be done to eventually stabilize and continue to support the government of Afghanistan. So as we present greater or sustained amounts of force there, I think the Taliban is coming out to fight. Also that's probably bolstered by al Qaeda that continues to want to make sure that it asserts itself there. So it's not just one thing. Did we miscue? No, not necessarily.

And what does it mean for the long haul? I think it means exactly where I see things pointing and what I think General Abizaid said, what Admiral Fallon said, and now what General Dempsey's saying. The past three combatant commanders have said there's a lot of work to be done in Afghanistan.

And, you know, Afghanistan is a different battle space than Iraq, so the lessons of Iraq may or may not work in Afghanistan. The situation is much different. The people are much different. The dynamics are much different; so still a lot of work to be done in Afghanistan.

And the things that we've got to look at are not just the military line of operation but a security line of operation that supports the Afghan government, but it must be coupled with rule-of-law governance, economic development, and social and cultural development. Those things we did learn in Iraq, but here we've got to see them play out in Afghanistan.

Can an ISAF or NATO and the U.S. coalition or the U.S. forces do that together? It's going to take maybe some readjustment of mission focus. I don't know. That's for politicians to decide and not me.

Q And do we have enough troops in Afghanistan?

GEN. HOLMES: I think I can answer that this way. You know, we're looking at the troops, and, you know, you've seen talk in open source that we're looking at increasing troop strength there. So I think the answer is we're taking a look, and you will see some moves to increase force strength there.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, let's go on and go to Grim.

Q Yes, sir. This is Grim of blackfive.net.

GEN. HOLMES: Hi.

Q I would like to ask you a bit more about your whole-of-government approach as it pertains to the situation in Pakistan. You mentioned the Afghan-Pak border. But obviously the situation in Pakistan more broadly impacts our efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere in PACOM as well.

So I would like to ask you about your interagency and whole-of-government approaches towards Pakistan. What sorts of things can we do to help them develop the capacities that would then allow us to address the situation in Afghanistan better?

GEN. HOLMES: Well, to answer that question, you know, first I'd have to say, you know, I think all of us realize the Pakistan situation right now, the political dynamic there, is, of course, very fragile as we see the resignation of Musharraf. We see the emergence of political rivals. And in our own system, that's very good. We'd like to see this play out with a peaceful play-out, if you will.

But for me to address a whole-of-government approach in Pakistan is very difficult, because we don't necessarily have established battle space there. Now, there are things we're doing on the diplomatic front. There are things that we're doing militarily so that, you know, we can assist in training or things like that. But the whole-of-government approach in that region really would be more applied to Afghanistan.

Now, in my mind, you can't necessarily solve Afghanistan unless you do solve things in Pakistan. But I would say the whole-of-government approach there would not be a military-led whole-of-government approach but one where we would look to our leadership at the grand politic level here, and particularly the State Department, as we work through that.

Pakistan is a very critical ally right now, so the things that we need to do would be to support them as they look to political resolution or political stability in their nation. And then we look to their military and how we can partner to assist in that.

Q I was mostly -- I mean, I understand. And, of course, you're perfectly correct that it's a civilian-led version of U.S. power. But I was wondering about, in your role dealing with interagency planning and operations, if you could talk a bit about how you see the needs that we have pointed towards Pakistan in helping them develop the way that we would like them to develop.

GEN. HOLMES: Right. You know, there what we would do, as a military partner in this whole-of-government scheme, would be as we look at the strategic objectives of Central Command -- and, of course, they're (nested in ?) international security objectives, those things that we could do to encourage partners like, let's say, USAID or State Department to do certain things or not so that things are in concert and that, in the scheme of things strategically, we don't miscue, but that everything is done in a manner of supporting as opposed to miscues, because I think too often we've been -- we've not been concerted in our effort. We don't realize unity of effort in a whole- of-government approach.

So I know I'm not giving you specifics in Pakistan only because we have not -- as I said, we focus or are focusing in Afghanistan on those things that we would want to do that would follow not only the security line of operation in training and working with the Afghan security forces, the Afghan National Army and their police forces, but those things that we could do with regard to economic and agricultural development, infrastructure development, rule of law, as we could work with their courts and judicial, and what we could do with nongovernmental agencies, because Afghanistan is clearly more of a maneuver area for this as opposed to us going into Pakistan, where, you know, I mean, there are certain things we just would not be obliged to do because we may not be welcomed to do there because Pakistan is a sovereign state.

You know, they've got control of their state. And then for us to offer what we would say would be a whole-of-government approach to doing something there may not be well-received, whereas in Afghanistan the situation is much different since we did conduct combat operations within the state of Afghanistan.

LT. CRAGG: Let's go ahead and go to Andrew, sir, if you're done.

Q General, Andrew Lubin. Good to talk to you again, sir.

GEN. HOLMES: Hey, Andrew. It's good to talk to you.

Q It's been too long. General, I want to follow up on Spencer's question a bit, with a bit more detail. It seems in the past two months the Taliban is actually trying to take us on army to army. You had last month when they overran the army base. Yesterday they had the bombing outside of Camp Blessing. And I understand this morning that it was actually French aviation and marine artillery that drove them away from the battle up in Usman (sp). They're getting more serious. These are more than just isolated insurgent fighting.

GEN. HOLMES: Well, we've seen, fighting season after fighting season, the Taliban have become more organized. And their fighting, in terms of being in units, has become more organized, and in some cases stronger. But that's not to be not expected. In other words, we would expect that. And again, in my mind, it goes back to they're not necessarily -- we are taking the presence of force to them. So they will engage. And that goes on my premise that we never left. In some ways, I think they thought we would leave, that we would grow faint. And we, the United States plus partners from the international community, are not leaving.

So, again, in my mind, are they coming to us in organized, large forces? Or are we just occupying battlespace, in critical nodes that are important to them, so they're coming out to fight there? I tend to think it's the second.

Q Okay.

GEN. HOLMES: And then, as we look at these larger attacks -- while they, in some purposes, serve an IO, an information operation, or strategic communication effect, you've really got to look at the effect on the battlefield. Are they really effective in these attacks?

Q Well, yeah, you kill 10, 20 at a time -- of us, at a time, that is relatively effective --

GEN. HOLMES: It is effective, but then you look at the other side where their losses are, in some cases, tens of tens, or even, you know, in -- 100 or more.

Q But you've -- I already seen, you know, with the French news, they're all horrified and want to -- you know, President Sarkozy can't get enough troops in before the French populous are already trying to pull them out again. That is effective IO from the Taliban side --

GEN. HOLMES: Well, that's what I said, it's effective IO. But, you know, this started was -- are they militarily effective?

Well, now, in the one attack that we saw last night, I mean, while it has a lot of spectacular value, militarily -- this other attack, the one in the, the FOB there in the east -- I'm not sure, militarily, we would say that was, you know, a great show of force. I mean, it may be a lot of people, but it was not necessarily an effective maneuver.

Q Okay. Point taken. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, next question is Christian.

Q Hi, General Holmes, this is Christian Lowe, with Military.com.

You know, I was going to ask another question, but I'm sorry, I've got to follow up on Andy's question here, and your answer. I'm flummoxed here. You're saying that -- you just said that in some cases the Taliban are more organized, and in some cases stronger?

GEN. HOLMES: I said they're --

Q So how can that be? In fact, last year we spoke with someone -- I think either from CENTCOM or inside the AO, and I asked that very same question that Andrew asked, what's -- what is the deal with these Taliban coming in numbers, and just getting wiped out? And he said it's basically the "B" team. That's all they can get to come in.

But you seem to be saying -- and these attacks, the success of the attacks seem to show, that they're getting a stronger, more organized "A" team.

GEN. HOLMES: No, I'd -- well, let me, let me clarify. I would still say, in some cases, they're the "B" team. We see them in stronger numbers, if you will, and they are fighting in more of an organized TTP than we would have seen just as a -- say, six years ago when they fought as just bands of irregular fighters.

So, we've seen TTP changes, so that they will fight more in a company-size -- you know, size element, with stronger numbers. Now, I'm not saying that they're necessarily more effective. A lot of the TTP, you know, just remains the same, in terms of their complex attack with, you know, ambushes or IEDs that they would have set up. But, I'm not trying to say that they are -- they are growing stronger, in terms of greater effect, just strength in the numbers that you would see.

Now, in some cases what we find is is that they are absolutely, more of their "B" team, which that would hold true, whoever you had talked to over a year ago. So, maybe that adds some clarity to it.

Q Yeah, but in some -- but it depends on how you define the word "effect." I mean, the U.S. military, you know, more and more, is talking about "effect," not in terms of, you know, wiping out a enemy company-sized unit, or taking a place of territory, it's making a desired effect on the enemy so that they're less able to do what they want to do.

Well, doesn't it sound like these attacks, while they didn't necessarily hold territory or keep the base for very long in Afghanistan; or kill that many people in the attack in Eastern Afghanistan today, the "effect" that they're having is much greater.

GEN. HOLMES: Well, that's -- I think we're trying to -- I think we're both saying the same thing here, so I don't want to talk past each other --

Q Okay, okay, thanks -- (inaudible) -- GEN. HOLMES: No, so if you're talking about military strength, okay, in what we see, they are fighting in a little more organized fashion, and they are fighting in, say, increased numbers. I won't even use the word -- the "s" word, "strength." They're fighting in increased numbers.

Okay, are they achieving great military effect? Well, in my mind, no, not necessarily. But what I did say earlier, in the answer to one of the questions, what we see is is they use these attacks for great information operation or strategic communication value. So, I don't deny that. That's -- that's part of the asymmetric fight. That's part of this adversary that cannot match us militarily.

But they will -- they will pursue a weapons of mass effect, and that's how they can manipulate information. Or they can just do something, and it gets amplified in such a way that it achieves an effect. So, if they, this adversary, can prosecute an attack -- whether militancy it's effective or not, but they can achieve information operation value of it -- in the European Press, in the American Press, or even in their own backyard, that is, that drives some of their military action I think.

So in some cases I don't think they seek to achieve military effect. They're seeking that IO effect. So, in that, I think we're saying the same thing.

Q Okay. Thanks. I would like to follow up, but I know there's other people here, so.

LT. CRAGG: Yes, there's two other bloggers.

And, sir, I have a question -- from a blogger who is now on the call, that I'll ask, after I get done with the sixth and seventh blogger, sir.

Let's go to Jarred and then Troy, and then I'll ask the question.

Q Yes, sir, thank you for your time.

I'd like to move over the Iraq, and perhaps you could talk a little bit about, what's the next, really, measurement of success that you see. Is it making sure that we have safe elections -- but that we still don't know if that's going to happen, but, really, is the metrics coming on? What are you kind of looking at, and --

GEN. HOLMES: Well, I think the next thing that we're looking for -- not only in terms of a metric or a landmark, is General Petraeus' assessment. And, you know, particularly with regard to the security line of operation, is the -- is the government of Iraq, the army of Iraq strong enough and capable enough to do, to continue to do whether it needs to do so that we don't cede any battlespace.

So, on that base of assessment from General Petraeus, then I think other things flow -- very critical, the elections; very critical, laws that can deal with, not only their own rule of law for how they will govern themselves, but the hydrocarbon laws. So, stability first -- I'm sorry, security first, which is, I think, going to be a large part of General Petraeus' assessment; and then the governance line of operation; and then, of course, coupled with economic development.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Troy, Jarred, if you're done with the questions?

Q Yep, go ahead.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

Troy?

Q Sir, how are you doing? This is Troy Stewart (sp) from -- (inaudible) --

My question is on, recently retired General McCaffrey just came back, and in July he published a -- what he called an "AAR," you know, it really (wasn't ?) an (After an Acton ?), from a tour that where he was at the NATO -- (inaudible) -- headquarters in Afghanistan.

In that report he called on several changes that need to happen -- or, things that need to really take place for Afghanistan to succeed beyond just the 10,000 -- 9 or 10,000 surge. He talked about, of course, really going -- NATO to step up; and this is true test of them; getting rid of corruption; getting rid of the narcotics; building the Afghanistan security forces. Multi-faceted solutions to (fix ?) Afghanistan (and win their ?).

Has your office -- have you been able to -- have you guys read that? I know a lot of the decisions come out of the administration kind of go along with this. I don't know if General McCaffrey had it first, or if he was developing this in tune. Just wondered if you can comment on this at all?

GEN. HOLMES: Well, I've not -- I've not read General McCaffrey's report. But from what you've just described to me, I can only imagine that it's not unlike many of the things that both Admiral Fallon had said, or the things that General Dempsey has looked with regard to Afghanistan.

And I can't think that they would be much different than what General Petraeus would look at, especially if we looked back at the way he approached Iraq. So that when Petraeus arrives here to be the combatant commander, I think he would then view those things that we need to be doing across multiple lines of interagency operations, if you will. Not to say the least of which is, okay, what do we -- what do we do, on an agricultural line of operation, with regard to the poppy product?

You know, the military does not do counternarcotics. So, it's not about counternarcotics, it's about -- okay, if we're going to establish a security line of operation in this country, then obviously from that, you don't necessarily get security if you can't resolve the economic and agricultural conundrum of 'what is the money maker?' Well, it's -- it's the poppy product.

So a strategy has got to deal with that. And we're looking at that. What do we do? The military does not necessarily do that. But what can we do to establish desired strategic objectives that the Interagency could step up to, with maybe Department of Agriculture, USAID, and State Department, to do that? What can NATO do to also help influence that?

With regard to that, just this week we have added to our staff in the -- this interagency endeavor, Dr. Martin Hanratty from the USAID. He's here for two years on an assignment. And, particularly, we're looking at what can -- what do we do in Afghanistan.

Q Okay, okay. The only other thing I'd add, sir, is he calls it this -- General McCaffrey says this is going to be a 25-year war. I'm wondering what your opinion is, if the country's ready to gut that out?

GEN. HOLMES: Well, I think it's going to be -- I'm not sure I would call it a 25-year war. One, that I wouldn't want to put numbers of years against it. But, you know, this is going to be a long-term endeavor to engage -- at a strategic level, to do those things across all of the many areas of need that would need to be done. So, is it going to take 25 years? I don't know. I think it's going to take -- you know, it's going to be a longer-term effort, but I wouldn't term it as a "long-term combat effort." And there's a difference there. It's a long-term effort if you're -- if you're going to assist a nation in governing, and producing, to change from a society of, basically, of a warrior and narcotic-growing society, into a productive society that can govern and provide services to its people, as well as develop a gross national product.

So, that does not come overnight. That's an institutional change that will take some time. But not a military combat operation for that length of time.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KZYER: Okay, sir, I just have one question from one of the bloggers who can't make it. I abuse his last name, it's Scott Melenczek (sp). He's a -- (inaudible) -- and here's the question, and then I'll go back to Christian, and then I'll -- we'll turn it over to you, sir, for a final wrap up.

Q Jennifer?

LT. CRAGG: Yes?

Q Sorry to interrupt. Jim Dabo (sp). I was wondering if I can get to the end of the line?

LT. CRAGG: Okay, just one quick question, because we're running out of time, so be really quick.

This one question from Scott is, can you take us through the process and (catalysts ?) by which today's terrorists go from being merely mad or frustrated, up to terrorist recruitment and suicide bombing? Can you explain that, if possible, sir?

GEN. HOLMES: Well, I think you've got to look at, first, the people who are susceptible to that in a different lens than we view, because it's very difficult for us to comprehend that. But, in the case of a disenfranchised youth, or a disenfranchised person that does not have the same value system that we have, then there are many things that can be done, I think, psychologically, to convince that person that to be a suicide bomber is the right course of action for them.

Now, there are any numbers of ways that that convincing could take place. You know, we're looking at suicide -- the female suicide bomber phenomenon in Iraq. And those are no longer foreign fighters that are recruited outside the borders of Iraq, but these were -- these were young, in some cases very young females that were recruited. And if you go back and look at it, they were disenfranchised; they were alone; they felt like that they had lost things that they wanted to live for, whether it was a brother or a husband. And so in order to either -- in their mind, get retribution, or to just find an easy way out, if they thought that they could live in an afterlife where this would be more attractive, then they can do -- they can take themselves to this, a notion of committing suicide.

We've -- we have cultural advisers who are -- who look continually at this phenomenon. We're doing many things in our information operations to try to combat that and to counter it. But that takes a long time. It's not just as easy as a 60-second commercial on the Super Bowl, as sometimes we like to think things are, in order to convince a particular target audience to do something or to not do something.

But, you know, this isn't a new phenomenon. We've seen -- you know, I mean, look at what Japan did with the Kamikaze pilots in World War II. So, we have to look at the, at the psychology of what brings a person to do that. I think it starts with disenfranchisement and just wanting to be somewhere else. And that's something that may be very difficult for us to understand through our United States of America lens.

LT. CRAGG: And, sir, just two follow-up questions. I'm going to go with Jim first, since he was number eight on the list, and we'll go back to Christian, and then we'll end today's call.

Jim, please go with your question.

Q Hi, General. Jim Dabo (sp), with -- (inaudible) -- blog.

Can we get an update on U.S. Coast Guard operations in support of OIF, and how are they doing?

GEN. HOLMES: Boy, I'll tell you, that's -- I'll be honest with you, I would have to do some research there. I do know that our Coast Guardsmen are doing some assisting in some ops there in OIF in the Gulf. But it would be -- I normally would not drill down into those ops without doing a little research for you.

Q Okay, that's fair.

GEN. HOLMES: Sorry, I'm not going to be able to give you a real good answer on that.

I do know that from time to time we will get reports of what they're doing. We rely on them particularly with their skills in helping guard the infrastructure there in the gulf.

Q Okay. Great.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Christian, your last question.

Q Okay, thanks General. To follow up on our discussion that we had from earlier here, how -- I guess it's a simple question -- how did we get to where we are now in Afghanistan? How have we allowed the Taliban to keep wielding this weapon of mass effect and have the effects that they're having recently, within the past year, let's say?

GEN. HOLMES: Well, I think -- I -- it's not so much that we let them do this, it's a matter of they never went away. You know, I -- I think there was a notion that we drove them out of the country and we didn't. The Taliban --

Q And -- then why not?

GEN. HOLMES: Well, because they -- they live there, and the Taliban ebbs and flows on a daily basis and -- and you've -- you've got to remember it's not just a -- it's not an army of people, it's just -- it is a people -- and they can ebb and flow -- and I'm trying to think of an example in our own country where -- and I can't think of one that would probably portray it very well -- but the numbers of Taliban can change by hundreds or thousands from week to week depending on what time of the year it is or, you know, if it's planting season or not. So the people live there.

You know, when I went into Afghanistan in early -- in the -- the fall of 2001 with -- our -- our special operators, you know, I -- I looked out there, I knew that we had defeated these -- these folks on the field of battle, but I could stand on Kandahar airfield and I knew that they were in the mountains still watching us; they didn't go away, they just went to their caves. (Audio break) -- they went back to their farms. So they never left. And -- and now, I think, the reason that we see them more is that we have -- we have sustained and -- now they're saying, okay, we're going to come get you, or we're going to present ourselves to you. So -- again this goes back to the nature of the kind of threats that we face. These are not necessarily, you know, standing, organized armies that wear uniforms like -- like we all envision warfare to be. So once you begin to, in my mind, put it in that perspective, you -- you see that it takes a different kind of tactic, in terms of countering, disrupting and defeating this kind of threat.

Q Okay, thanks a lot.

Q Hey, can I ask one real quick question?

LT. CRAGG: I think we're -- we're out of time, sir, unless you -- we're about five minutes past allotted time, sir, if you want to wrap it up.

GEN. HOLMES: I'll take that one last question.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Roger that.

Q This is a relatively simple one, General. This is Scott from Flopping Aces.

GEN. HOLMES: Okay.

Q When you go to family gatherings -- weddings, barbecues, whatever -- and you talk to civilians, relatives, friends, what do you tell them about the global war on terror, Iraq, success, what's needed and how things are going?

GEN. HOLMES: Well, what do I tell them about the war on terror?

Q In general, what -- to civilians, to people that don't understand the difference between asymmetric warfare and conventional and that kind of thing?

GEN. HOLMES: Yeah, well I-- I have the occasion to do that every now and then, particularly with my family as they will ask me that question and I tried to explain to them in terms -- and my wife reminds me that I can't talk in military speak -- (laughter) -- but -- but I try -- I try to explain the fact that these are violent extreme actors that are opposed to those things that we value, and that they are very smart, they are a very creative adversary and they're -- they move at the speed of the Internet. they move -- they move at the speed of the knowledge age that we're in because they're not constrained. And when you begin to understand this kind of threat, what I try to share with my -- particularly my own family is that to depend on solely a military solution to counter and defeat this kind of threat is -- it will be a shortcoming and it will take a whole-of-government approach and a whole of many nations' governments approach to countering this kind of threat.

Q Thank you so much. That's exactly what I was kind of hoping to hear.

GEN. HOLMES: Okay. Thank you. LT. CRAGG: And sir, I'll turn it over to you for a final statement.

GEN. HOLMES: Well, I'll tell you, I think we've covered everything for -- I think my final statement would be to thank all of you for what you do because as we work through this and continue -- I look at what we do as building relationships so that one, you hopefully begin to trust me, I trust you and we understand that we don't necessarily agree on everything, but we discuss the kinds of things that all of us need to share. Particularly, I -- I think in a huge area that you live in what I call the blogosphere -- I think it's very important. So I've just got to say as my parting statement, thank you for what you do.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, for that.

And that wraps up today's DOD Bloggers' Roundtable. This program will be available on the bloggers' link on dod.mil where you'll be able to access the story based on today's call, along with force documents such as Brigadier General Holmes' bio, the audio file and the print transcript. Thank you to all the bloggers on the call and, of course, thank you, sir, for joining us today.

GEN. HOLMES: Thank you.

Q Thanks, General.

Q General Holmes, thanks very much, appreciate it. Thank you.

END.